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TRAINING OF FORENSIC CHEMISTS IN THE USSR

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Prof M. D. Shvaykova

The cadres of forensic chemists are not extensive, and because of this, the demand on them by our country, as represented by the organs of justice and the organs of health whom forensic chemists serve, is correspondingly greater.

In executing assignments of the organs of justice, forensic chemists are conducting numerous and complex investigations for the purpose of detecting and identifying poisonous and potent substances in material evidence of various types (internal organs of human and animal corpses, food products, medicinal preparations, and many other objects), and are carrying out other no less important tasks for the judiciary-investigating organs.

In serving the organs of health forensic chemistry, as well as forensic medicine, to a large degree contributes to the prevention of poisonings from various causes (industrial, those arising under domestic conditions, and medicinal).

The number of problems confronting forensic chemistry, and the demands which are being made on the forensic chemist, are growing with each passing year. The reasons for this are, on the one hand, the great and daily solicitude of the Communist Party and the Soviet Government for the improvement of the living and working conditions of the Soviet citizen, and, on the other hand, the vigorous growth of the chemical and pharmaceutical industry, the great increase in the number of synthetic substances, and the introduction into daily use of an evergrowing number of industrial products (medicinal preparations, insecticides, fungicides, and agents for the extermination of rats) necessary to the national economy.

To satisfy these ever-growing demands, the forensic chemist must receive a training on a level with the achievements of contemporary science, and he must also be able to correlate the vast amount of practical work with his continuously broadening and deepening knowledge. And this means that the forensic chemist, first of all, must receive a thorough training in the fields of pharmacy and forensic chemistry while he is in attendance at the school of higher education, and, second, he must be able from time to time to supplement his knowledge by attending appropriate courses for advanced training.

The first problem is that of training chief pharmacists in the field of forensic chemistry. (It is not within the scope of our inquiry to dwell on questions related to training in other fields of pharmacy.) All past experience that has been gained in our country as well as in foreign lands has shown that only persons who have received a higher pharmaceutical education, and who have been given specialized training in forensic chemistry, are able to fill positions as forensic chemists.

In the USSR, forensic chemistry is being taught in colleges [literally "higher educational institutions"] of pharmacy exclusively. Until recent times these colleges had independent chairs for this purpose. At the present time, in conformity with the new plans for education, most of these as well as a number of other nonspecialized chairs, have been attached to other chairs (for instance those of analytical, inorganic, and pharmaceutical chemistry) as "courses in forensic chemistry." Heading these amalgamated chairs are frequently persons who have no specialized knowledge of the field of forensic chemistry and no practical experience in forensic - chemical expertise procedures, and who furthermore are frequently even without a specialized pharmaceutical education.



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Under these conditions, forensic chemistry as a specialized discipline is in a highly unfavorable position. It is clear that at these amalgamated faculties the principal discipline is the science to which the largest number of hours is devoted, while forensic chemistry, which has been added as a course, occupies a place of secondary importance. The main teaching and professorial personnel of the chair is made up of specialists in the principal science, and to this science are devoted in the main the interests of the staff and the facilities of the chair. Forensic chemistry as a science suffers.

Under such conditions it is hardly possible to secure a thorough training of the future chief pharmacists active in the field of forensic chemistry. Moreover, under such conditions the "courses of forensic chemistry" cannot provide for the study of specific problems that have a bearing on forensic chemistry, and are not capable of exerting any influence upon the development of this branch of pharmaceutical science.

It stems from what has been said that it is necessary to reestablish in the higher schools of pharmacy independent chairs of forensic chemistry, and that steps must be taken to staff these chairs with appropriate specialists.

As to the second question -- that of improving the qualifications of the pharmacists now working in the field of forensic chemistry -- it is inevitably a continuation of the first.

In 1951, the Ministry of Health USSR, seeking to improve the training of forensic chemists and to raise the level of forensic medical and forensic chemical expertise, organized at the Moscow Institute of Pharmacy annual courses of study for the purpose of giving advanced training to forensic chemists.

Practical experience has confirmed the timeliness of this act. In the course of 2 years, 56 forensic chemists with a wide range of experience (up to 25 years) have taken these courses of advanced training. This measure was of considerable assistance to the forensic chemists in their responsible practical activities.

Nevertheless, because of a lack of classrooms and study facilities at the Moscow Institute of Pharmacy, a number of defects developed which had an adverse effect on the work of those who attended the courses. One of the courses of study, for instance, began its work 10 days late; students who attended the first and second courses were disproportionally loaded with curriculum studies (4 to 10 hours a day), with these studies in most cases being made in the evening; there was a lack of necessary planning in conducting the courses.

The improvement of the qualifications of chief pharmacists now working in the field of forensic chemistry is an extremely important measure, one of great state significance.

It is necessary to create at the Moscow Institute of Pharmacy (a central institute, better equipped than all other pharmacy institutes, and one which has a sufficient number of qualified teaching and professorial personnel) conditions which will make it possible for the large number of graduates from pharmacy institutes and for forensic chemists to renew and broaden the knowledge in their special field every 5-6 years.

The Main Inspection Office of Medical Education of the Ministry of Health USSR must give more attention to the problems of training cadres of pharmacists, including cadres of forensic chemists, and to the improvement of their qualifications.

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